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HENRY KELLER: PAINTINGS OF A TRAVELER
October 12, 1993 - January 2, 1994

Henry Keller (1869-1949), for over forty years one of Cleveland's leading artists and most influential teachers, broadened his knowledge of art and the world by constant travel. An exhibition of paintings and drawings that Keller made while studying in Germany and during frequent trips to Europe, North America, and the Caribbean offers a revealing look at the experiences that shaped his artistic vision. **Henry Keller: Paintings of a Traveler**, on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from October 12, 1993, to January 2, 1994, includes thirty oil and watercolor paintings, fourteen sketchbooks and sixteen drawings--many never before exhibited--together with photographs and other documentary materials chosen from the collections of The Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Artists Foundation, and private lenders.

The son of German immigrants, Keller received his initial artistic training in Cleveland, where he worked from 1891 to 1899 as a commercial lithographer specializing in animal subjects. In 1899 he went abroad to study in Düsseldorf, followed by two years at the Royal Academy of Art in Munich, under the instruction of Heinrich Zügel, a renowned painter of animals. This exhibition begins with carefully observed outdoor oil studies of cattle, horses, and goats that Keller painted in 1901 when he was working with Zügel. While in Germany, Keller went on painting excursions with other American artist friends to the Rhine Valley, Holland, and Italy.

After receiving a silver medal at the Munich Royal Academy exhibition of 1902, Keller accepted a position at the Cleveland School of Art (now the Cleveland Institute of Art), where he remained on the faculty until 1945. His first assignment was to teach watercolor, a favorite medium which he often used to record his responses to new places and experiences. An early watercolor painting of a horse-drawn cart and pedestrians on a peaceful tree-lined street in The Hague, in Holland, done in 1905, is finely detailed, in marked contrast to the loosely brushed watercolors of his mature years.

Keller did not consider himself a naturalist and was not content recording mere surface appearances. Interested in avant-garde European art, he admired the rhythmic energy of Cézanne's paintings and his use of color to model forms. In 1913 Keller co-authored an article on the physiology of color vision in modern art, organized an exhibition of Cubist works for the Taylor Galleries in Cleveland, and exhibited two paintings in the New York Armory Show.

On a visit to the California coast in 1915 he painted watercolors of the ocean cliffs, discovering rhythms in their massive forms that reminded him of the structural rhythms in the landscapes of Cézanne and Chinese Sung Dynasty masters. In a watercolor view of cliffs and surf at Sara Beach, near Mission Capistrano, which he titled *Abstract Rhythms*, he simplified and reduced rocky forms to strong, abstract, decorative shapes.

In the 1920s Keller used watercolor to capture his impressions of Spain, Portugal, Puerto Rico, and the Austrian Tyrol. His technique became increasingly fluid and spontaneous, reflecting his desire to capture the "vital" experience of a place, which he deemed more important than a literal description of its topography. During his later years he painted with swift, gestural brushstrokes and pure color, leaving areas of the paper unpainted to achieve a greater luminosity. *The Cove at La Jolla, California*, a 1935 watercolor of bathers on a beach below rocky cliffs, is a good example: forms are suggested rather than defined, with sketchy incomplete outlines, while large areas of the paper are left untouched.

In 1936 Charles Burchfield, Keller's most celebrated student, wrote, "Some of Keller's best work has been done in transparent watercolor. In many of them he shows somewhat the influence of the Chinese, whom he has always admired and studied, not in any imitative manner, but in the fundamental sense that he has...learned to say a great deal with economy of means and little apparent effort."

William Robinson, assistant curator of modern art, organized the exhibition--installed in the Museum's Lower Level Education Gallery--and wrote its explanatory labels and accompanying brochure. The exhibition is made possible by generous support from the LTV Steel Company.

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For additional information, photographs or color slides, please contact Ann Edwards, Public Information, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland OH 44106; 216/421-7340.